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L'Affaire Ben Barka

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THE CASE of Mehdi Ben Barka, the émigré Moroccan opposition leader who was kidnapped in the heart of Paris on October 29 last and is believed to have been murdered, has grown into a big international and political scandal. On January 20 French Public Prosecutor Guy Chavanon announced that Judge Louis Zollinger, in charge of the investigation, had issued international arrest warrants for Moroccan Home Minister General Mohammed Oufkir, Moroccan security chief Major Mohammed Dlimi, and Moroccan secret service chief Miloud Chtouki. According to France Presse, the International Police Association (Interpol) has sent the arrest warrants to all the signatories of the agreement on extradition of criminals, with the exception of Morocco. This agreement binds the signatory countries to arrest the three Moroccans as soon as they are discovered.

The French judicial authorities took this decision after a special Cabinet meeting called to discuss the Ben Barka case. On the conclusion of the meeting, Secretary of State for Information Yvon Bourges told reporters that the French government had ordered a thorough investigation of this "criminal enterprise organized from abroad with the connivance of certain French secret agents and police."

On January 23 the French government recalled Ambassador Robert Gillet from Rabat. Before his departure, M. Gillet handed Moroccan Foreign Minister Ahmed Taïbi Benhima a note saying the investigation into the Ben Barka case had confirmed that the Moroccan Home Minister and some of his subordi-

nates "personally participated in the final stages of the operation."

To demand the arrest of another country's Home Minister and his aides is an extraordinary thing. The French authorities decided on this step only after they had thoroughly investigated their part in the Ben Barka case. The official findings have not yet been published, but French press reports give the following picture.

The Moroccan secret service, ordered to do away with the leader of the influential opposition National Union of People's Forces, resolved to do so with the hands of French gangsters. The job of tracking Ben Barka down was given to Chtouki, who established contact with a shady character known as Georges Figon.

This Figon was sentenced to twenty years hard labour in 1955 for robbery and shooting at the police. Paroled in 1961, he went into business. Last year the former jailbird agreed, for a handsome remuneration, to recruit gangsters and kidnap Ben Barka. On Chtouki's suggestion, he asked Ben Barka to "advise" him on the anti-colonial film "Basta" which he allegedly was preparing to produce. On October 29 Ben Barka arrived in Paris from Geneva to discuss the details.

Shortly after his arrival, it may be recalled, Ben Barka was hailed by French police officers Souchon and Voltot and bundled into a waiting car. Later, a group of gangsters and Moroccan secret agents, including Chtouki, took him to a villa at Fontenay-le-Vicomte owned by a gangster called Boucheseiche. On the following day, General Oufkir and Major Dlimi arrived from Morocco and immediately proceeded to this villa. According to a tape recording

Ben Barka's abduction was discussed in New Times No. 40 for 1966.

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